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# *The Jordanian Regime Fights the War of Ideas*

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In recent years, the Jordanian regime has faced a growing threat to its stability from violent as well as politically radical Islamic groups. The most blatant expressions of this were the rocket attacks on Aqaba in May 2005 and the subsequent attacks on hotels in Amman in November of the same year. These attacks were carried out by groups affiliated with the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and the al-Qaeda organization in Iraq.

Even after Zarqawi's demise in 2006, however, the Jordanian regime did not let up on its efforts to confront radical Islamic groups. Instead, it continued to fight an all-out war against radical Islamic organizations. Unlike other states in the region and elsewhere whose activity against radical Islam concentrates primarily on military-terrorist aspects, the Jordanian regime has aimed explicitly at weakening radical *salafi* ideology, and specifically, *takfiri* ideology, which it sees as a main source from which Islamist terror and radical political movements spring. In this struggle with extremist ideology, the Jordanian regime has focused on two connected objectives: de-legitimizing and refuting radical *salafi* ideas, and disseminating a more moderate, traditional conception of Islam in the hopes of "immunizing" susceptible publics against extremist Islam. In addition to tackling radical ideology in this two-fold way domestically, the Jordanian regime has also attempted to discredit radical ideas and mobilize moderate Islamic forces throughout the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup>

This article analyzes the Jordanian regime's efforts to defend itself and to launch a counterattack against *takfiri-jihadi* ideology during the second half of 2005 and in 2006—a time during which various radical Islamist elements had become emboldened and intensified their terrorist and political campaign to undermine the Jordanian government.

## Radicalism's Strengths

In recent years, public opinion surveys conducted in Jordan have confirmed that a portion of the population subscribes to *takfiri-jihadi* ideology and helps to recruit and organize support for al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups.<sup>2</sup> This extremist Islamic stream enjoys several significant advantages and sources of strength, including a diverse organizational and ideological infrastructure; an ability to rely on and benefit from the political and ideological cover provided by the radical mainstream Muslim Brotherhood movement (which has deep roots amongst both the Trans-Jordanian and Palestinian publics in Jordan); and the regional impact of the war in Iraq, which radicals have skillfully used to inflame passions and disseminate their ideas on the so-called "Arab Street." Tackling all of these sources of strength poses a number of challenges to the Jordan regime, as it has a weak religious establishment that lacks popular authority and is incapable of mobilizing those with religious authority to defend the regime's views.

The institutional infrastructure of the *salafi-jihadi* stream in Jordan includes the many websites of global jihad groups, which provide mass dissemination of the ideology, as well as book stands and popular mosques that are not under the regime's supervision.<sup>3</sup> Many activists from jihad groups who have been arrested were first indoctrinated with extremist ideology in these popular mosques.<sup>4</sup> Although many of these mosques are led by preachers who, from a traditional Islamic perspective, lack religious credentials to be considered legitimate scholars, young people in particular are easy prey for their propaganda.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement plays a central role in preparing the ground for the internalization and absorption of *salafi* ideology in Jordanian society, especially among the younger generation. Since the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Jordan, there have been internal struggles within that movement between one wing that aspires to engage politically with the existing regime, and another, more extremist wing, schooled in the *takfiri* doctrine of Sayed Qutb, which engages in a sharp political and ideological confrontation with the regime. Throughout most of the movement's history in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood's extremist wing has usually been identified with leaders of Palestinian origin, whose identification with the Hashemite regime was weaker than that of their Trans-Jordanian colleagues.<sup>5</sup> In the past, this extremist wing has been relatively marginal, and in the 1980s and 1990s its main energy was directed toward the jihad in Afghanistan and subsequently in Chechnya, Bosnia, and other places. However, especially in the last year, this stream has gained strength, as reflected in the public elections in early 2006 for the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Action Front party, in which more radical individuals were elected. The extremist wing has been a leading element in the intensified Islamist confrontation with the Jordanian regime ever since.<sup>6</sup> One expression of the Muslim Brotherhood's *takfiri* and *jihadi* outlook is the

religious rulings of its leaders supporting the jihad in Iraq and Palestine and demanding that Arab leaders rally Muslims to join the fight. These religious rulings assert that any Muslim providing assistance to infidel “occupying forces” is committing an act of treachery and declaring war on Allah and his prophet, which is in essence an act of heresy and abandonment of the community of believers (*khuruj min milat al-islam*).<sup>7</sup>

The ongoing war in Iraq has also contributed to the strengthening of *takfiri-jihadi* ideology in Jordan. Extremist Islamic organizations in Iraq, led by the al-Qaeda movement, are viewed by many radicals as the vanguard in the war against Islam’s enemies, and they enjoy the admiration of and moral support from some Jordanians and others throughout the Arab world. The war has served as a major catalyst enabling the leaders of these organizations to disseminate the idea of jihad throughout the Arab and Muslim world. Their extremist interpretation requires each Muslim to devote himself to jihad (*fard ‘ayn*) at this time, because they portray the fighting in Iraq as a war against foreigners who have captured Muslim land. The intensive propaganda campaign conducted by al-Qaeda and its affiliated organizations via the media, especially on the Internet, only reinforces this position. This propaganda reaches almost every home and facilitates the formation of local terrorist organizations, some of which are linked to existing organizations and some of which are independent. The Jordanian regime has not been passive in the face of this propaganda, and has not taken the easy path of relying on the “less radical” Muslim Brotherhood as an alternative to al-Qaeda.

## Four Tests

Since the end of 2005, the Jordanian regime has faced four important tests in its ongoing struggle with *takfiri-jihadi* ideology. The first test was initiated by the *takfiri-jihadi* camp itself on November 9, 2005, with the series of attacks that were simultaneously launched against three hotels in Amman. Following the attacks, Zarqawi issued a communiqué to the Jordanian public justifying the bombings, whose victims were Muslims, and sharply criticizing the Jordanian regime. The bombings were viewed by Jordan’s establishment as a serious turning point with regard to Islamic terror threats against the stability of the kingdom and its government. The attacks were a blow to internal security and revealed that Zarqawi had a considerable number of sympathizers. Many regarded him as a hero waging war against the American aggressor and enemy, whereas others even expressly identified with his *salafi-jihadi* outlook.

King Abdullah responded to the bombings by ordering a more comprehensive and aggressive campaign against Islamic terrorism and its ideology. At the end of November 2005, he replaced the government of Badran, only seven months after its establishment, and formed a new government led by a former general and outgoing Jordanian ambassador to Israel, Marouf Bakhit. In his letter of appointment for the new government, the king

launched an unprecedented attack against what he described as the “culture of *takfir*” and instructed the government to draw up a strategy against it that would not only focus on a security solution, but also develop ideological, cultural, and political strategies against this extremist ideology.<sup>8</sup> Among other things, King Abdullah called for increased utilization of the media to disseminate alternative Islamic ideas and the values of tolerance and moderation, with the “Amman Letter” he had initiated and published in 2005 serving as the source of training and inspiration.<sup>9</sup> The Amman Letter was issued by a convention of 180 Muslim scholars from various schools that was organized by the King and that aimed at presenting a wide consensus of scholars against “illegitimate, extremist fatwas” that justify terrorism.

The second test came from the most radical wing of the Muslim Brotherhood. Drawing encouragement from the victory of Hamas in the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, they expressed support for a Hamas government, demanded the return of the Hamas representatives to Jordan who had been expelled in 1999, and rejected the Jordanian regime’s accusations that Hamas had tried to smuggle weapons into Jordan with the goal of carrying out attacks within the kingdom. This stance by the Muslim Brotherhood placed it in direct confrontation with the Jordanian regime. The opposition of Hamas to peace with Israel, a country with which Jordan has signed a peace accord, and its adherence to an active jihad against Israel, made any kind of exchange impossible. Moreover, in the Jordanian regime’s view, discussions with the Hamas government would benefit the Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian wing (a substantial part of the movement), thereby strengthening the most radical faction of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Jordanian branch, which had won important institutional leadership positions in the parliamentary elections in March 2006.

The third test began immediately after the killing of Zarqawi by American forces in Iraq on June 9, 2006. That was an outstanding achievement, and the Jordanian regime openly celebrated the role it claimed to have played in the operation. But this exuberance dimmed following the unusual step taken by four Muslim Brotherhood members of the Jordanian parliament, who visited the Zarqawi family’s house of mourning in the city of Zarqa and conveyed their condolences. The most prominent of them, Shaykh Mohammed Abu Fares, who is known for his adherence to the *takfir* idea, went so far as to declare Zarqawi a martyr (*shaheed*). At the same time, he stated that Zarqawi’s victims in the series of hotel bombings on November 9, 2005, could also be considered martyrs from the perspective of Islamic law.<sup>10</sup>

The condolence visit paid by the parliamentarians and Abu Fares’ declaration, which was regarded by many as a religious ruling, together with the refusal of the Muslim Brotherhood’s leadership and party to apologize for these moves, sent shock waves through the Jordanian establishment. From the Jordanian regime’s perspective, the actions of the four parliamentarians, together with the Muslim Brotherhood’s declared support for Hamas,

gave legitimacy to the *takfiri-jihadi* ideology and even encouraged acts of terror.<sup>11</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood's actions were seen as an unprecedented provocation and as a harsh blow to the regime's fight against terrorism and the ideology that drives it.

The regime responded immediately by arresting the four members of parliament. The government then issued a series of harsh condemnations that bordered on accusing the four of attempting to incite a civil war (*fitna*) because of the uproar they had aroused. In an attempt to calm the atmosphere, the parliamentary bloc of the Islamic Action Front issued an announcement declaring the Muslim Brotherhood's loyalty to the state and their disavowal of terrorism and notions of *takfir*.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this conciliatory gesture, the regime launched a vigorous campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood. It exercised the law to its fullest extent against three of the four members of parliament by bringing them to trial at the State Security Court. Mohammed Abu Faras and a second parliamentarian, Ali Abu Sukar, were charged with harming national unity and inciting fanaticism and racism and received prison terms of a year and a half.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the court struck a blow at the movement's socioeconomic stronghold, the Islamic Center Association. The association incorporates many dozens of social welfare and medical assistance centers for the general public, thereby helping the movement to garner public sympathy and electoral support. Citing reasons of financial mismanagement and poor organization, the regime expropriated the Muslim Brotherhood's control over the Islamic Center Association and transferred it to the management of a council operating on the regime's behalf.<sup>14</sup> In early October 2006, King Abdullah awarded a pardon to Abu Fares and Abu Sukar, who were released from prison. However, the indictments against them were not cancelled, and they did not return to parliament.<sup>15</sup>

The fourth test of the Jordanian regime occurred when the war broke out in Lebanon between Israel and the Hezbollah organization on July 12, 2006. This conflict served as a great boon to the Muslim Brotherhood, as it diverted the attention of the Jordanian establishment, public opinion, and the media, and thereby diminished the intense campaign the regime had been waging against the Muslim Brotherhood. The Israel-Hezbollah war also provided the Muslim Brotherhood with new ammunition to promote its ideology, calling for an Islamic battle in the spirit of jihad against Israel and its principal ally, the United States. The Muslim Brotherhood disregarded the religious disparities between Sunni and Shi'a, declaring complete solidarity with Hezbollah and the Lebanese people.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's expressions of support for Hezbollah were numerous. The secretary general of the Islamic Action Front, Zaki Bani Arsheed, sent a letter to Hezbollah's leader Shaykh Hassan Nasrallah congratulating him on "the victory against the Israeli-American attack." Dr. Ibrahim Zaid al-Kilani, head of the Association of Scholars of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, issued a fatwa on July 30, 2006, that described the resistance (*muqawama*) of Hezbollah and the jihad in Palestine and Iraq as a single battle of Islam against its enemies, and called on Muslim leaders to

support “the resistance and the jihad” with arms, money and all of their “soul.” These fatwas are similar in spirit to those issued by Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Qatar-based Egyptian cleric whose rulings are widely accepted by the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas as authoritative. Qaradawi rejects the rulings of Wahhabi shaykhs as well as statements by Ayman al-Zawahiri that describe Hezbollah and the Shi’a in general as heretical, and gives priority instead to the conduct of jihad and the struggle against Islam’s perceived enemies.<sup>17</sup> Qaradawi states, in fact, that there is nothing wrong with the Shi’a identity of the Lebanese resistance as long as it bears arms, strives to purify Muslim land from the Israeli stain, and is victorious. He refers to Hezbollah as undertaking a religiously legitimate Islamic jihad and compares this struggle to “its sister in Palestine.”<sup>18</sup>

The Jordanian regime tried to take the wind out of the sails of the Muslim Brotherhood’s propaganda on this issue by declaring its overall support for the country and people of Lebanon, by expediting large air shipments of relief supplies to meet vital humanitarian needs, and by offering to rebuild what was destroyed in the war. When the war was over, the regime renewed its measures vis-à-vis the Muslim Brotherhood by passing legislation aimed at restricting the Muslim Brotherhood’s religious-political methods of operation. The law restricts the use of mosques and public sermons in order to reduce public incitement.

## Countering Salafi Ideology

The campaign waged by the Jordanian regime to de-legitimize *takfiri-jihadi* ideology actually began more than a year prior to the Amman hotel bombings with the publication of the “Amman Letter” (*Risalat Amman*) on November 27, 2004. The initiative for the letter is credited to King Abdullah himself, who derives authority from his status as a descendant of the Prophet’s family, and the text was posted on the home page of the king’s Internet site. The document presents a moderate formulation of Islam based on a middle way (*wasatiyya*). The Amman Letter’s “middle way” teaching differs from the radical middle way preached by Shaykh Yusuf Qaradawi as well as many Saudi elements in that it focuses on daily religious practice, and not on the use of Islam for encouraging political struggle and violence. The Amman Letter further advocates co-existence between peoples built upon respect for mutual pacts and agreements, and rejects *takfiri-jihadi* ideology as a clear distortion of Islam.

The Jordanian regime lobbied to obtain wide Islamic backing from religious authorities for the document at a July 2005 conference of prominent Islamic scholars, both Shi’a and Sunni, that it convened in Amman. The conference adopted the document and approved fatwas advocating co-existence between the eight “legitimate” schools of Sunni and Shi’a Islam. It also sought to refute the religious and legal foundations of *takfiri-jihadi* ideology. Two other decisions made at the conference carried great weight: an

agreement among scholars to invalidate any accusation of *takfir* and an attempt to limit the authority to issue fatwas to widely accepted ulama, thus prohibiting “unqualified clergy” from issuing fatwas.<sup>19</sup>

After the November 2005 bombings, the regime sought to mobilize the Islamic world to stand by its side in its battle against radical *salafi* ideology. One early expression of its success in this effort came at a summit conference of the Islamic Council organization, which approved a number of decisions condemning the *takfiri* doctrine and supporting the Amman Letter. The Bakhit government also launched a campaign denouncing *takfiri* ideas and advocating the adoption of moderate Islam. The Amman Net radio broadcast a round-table discussion about the rise of the *takfiri-jihadi* ideology in which the speakers described that ideology as a modern-day continuation of the ideology of the *khawarij* movement, a violent movement rejected as heretical long ago by mainstream Sunni Islam.<sup>20</sup> The speakers also attempted to refute *takfiri* ideology by citing a number of *sharia* prohibitions, including those against declaring that a Muslim is a heretic unless he publicly announces his heresy; the prohibition on spilling Muslim blood—except the blood of those who engage in prostitution, abandon the religion and Muslim community (*rida*), or commit an act of murder; and the fact that the authority to carry out a death sentence is given to the Muslim ruler alone. The speakers additionally cited a traditional prohibition against any group issuing or acting upon a fatwa that is contrary to an existing fatwa, as well as a prohibition against harming non-Muslim civilians such as women and children and those who do not bear weapons. Finally, they rejected the *takfiri* doctrine that permits the killing of a Muslim who is under the protection of a non-Muslim during a war against them (*tatarus*).

Another conference sponsored by the Jordanian Center for Research and Information in mid-March 2006 expressed sweeping opposition to the phenomenon of religious extremism. The ulama and scholars who attended attacked in particular the imposition of “religio-legal terror” (*irhab fiqhi*) on Muslims by schools of religious law, and in the use of *takfir* by a number of preachers against Muslims who did not accept the opinion of a certain religious sage (*‘alim, faqih*). One former Jordanian minister, Shaykh Abd al-Aziz al-Hiyat, pointed out that even the companions of the prophet had disagreed with one another, yet unlike modern-day adherents to *takfiri* ideology, they did not refer to each other as heretics.<sup>21</sup> On April 24, 2006, a conference on “The Role of the Moderate Stream (*wasatiyya*) in the Reform and Awakening of the Nation” opened in Amman under the patronage of Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed and with the participation of prominent Sunni and Shi’a religious scholars from throughout the Middle East. In addition to rejecting extremism and violence, the conference advocated adopting the principles of the Amman Letter and the decisions of the conferences of the moderate stream of Islam that have been held in recent years in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The conference also called for dialogue between the various Islamic streams in order to reach a common

approach for confronting the challenges facing the contemporary Muslim world. Finally, the conference addressed the need for Muslims to think about globalization not as a threat but as an opportunity for reciprocal relations with the world and, in particular, European cultures.<sup>22</sup>

On May 27, 2006, another conference convened in Amman to address the challenges of creating a “Civic Democratic Islamic Discourse.” Some fifty religious scholars from twenty-one countries participated in the conference, which was organized by the Al-Quds Center for Political Studies and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. The conference discussed a number of issues, including the future of Islam in light of democracy and globalization, the relationships between religion and the state, the idea of the state in modern Islamic thought, and the concepts of jihad, terror, violence, transfers of power, pluralism, and minority rights of non-Muslims in Muslim societies.

Conference participants presented papers that thoroughly debunked the *takfir* doctrine and the use of force to impose ideas, and also made proposals for waging war against the *takfiri* and *jihadi* ideas. Several participants focused on the problematic nature of the Muslim Brotherhood’s political ideology, which is not, they said, consistent with moderate Islam and the values of democracy, and is infected with *takfiri* ideology.<sup>23</sup> The conference called for Islamic movements to “close the gates of *takfir* and *tafsik*” (accusing someone of disavowing Islam); to break through the intellectual stagnation and isolation they have brought upon themselves; to come to terms with modern innovations; and not to take a rigid view of statements attributed to the Prophet.<sup>24</sup> An additional call was made to demand that the Muslim Brotherhood movement internalize the principles of democracy in its philosophical literature and organizational outlook and institute reforms in its religious view based on enlightenment, civic responsibility, and the full acceptance of democracy. The implication was that as long as the Muslim Brotherhood failed to do this, its participation in the political process in the state should be restricted.<sup>25</sup>

On August 25, 2006, the Al-Fiqh Al-Islami Institute convened yet another conference in Amman attended by religious scholars from throughout the Muslim world. The conference was largely devoted to exploring Islam’s stance toward extremism and terror. One Jordanian representative (the advisor for Islamic affairs, Abd al-Salam al-Abadi) presented the key points of the Amman Letter. The conference participants issued a strong attack on *tafkiri* and *jihadi* ideas from Islamic and universal perspectives. In this context, the conference attempted to draw a distinction between jihad in Islam and the doctrine of terror adopted by contemporary extremist organizations.<sup>26</sup> They argued that jihad was designed to protect the sanctity of Islam, and that its goals and methods are well defined. By contrast, the doctrine of terror, which is quick to accuse others of disavowing Islam (*fasuk*), heresy (*kufir*), and abandoning the community (*al khuruj min al mila*), was designed to impose beliefs and opinions. The conference denounced what it described as “the mounting chaos of fatwas” (*faudat al-fatawa al-mutshadedeh*) issued by “unqualified

people who lack the appropriate education,” citing fatwas that label groups and individuals as heretics and cause rifts among Muslims. Like the Amman conference in November 2004, speakers at this conference also devoted attention to defining the characteristics and qualifications required of a religious mufti before issuing a fatwa.

### Tackling the Culture of *Takfir*

Another tactic of the Jordanian regime in its battle against Islamic extremism has been an attempt to refute the central religious tenets of the *takfiri* ideology. These include: the *salafi* interpretation of the concept of *kufir* (heresy) in the Quran and Hadith; the concept of jihad; the concept of *tatarus*; and the concept of *mu'ahad*.

Following the bombings in Amman, commentaries on Islamic law were published in Jordanian newspapers based on the opinions and rulings of religious scholars who had refuted the hard-line *takfiri* concepts of *kufir* and *kufar* (heresy and heretics). According to the *takfiri* concept, whenever these words appear in the Quran and Hadith they refer to *rida*, or denial of Islam and abandonment of the religion and the community of Muslims. In the hands of modern *salafist* ideologues, this interpretation is intended to prove that the *takfir* idea is not the invention of modern *takfiri* ideology, but actually originates from the Quran itself. *Takfiri* ideology refers similarly to the concept of *kufar*, in the sense of *murtadun* (heretics), which appears in the following verse that leaders of this stream often quote in their writings: “Those who do not rule in accordance with Allah’s revelations are the disbelievers.” (Quran 5:44). According to the *takfiri* interpretation of this verse, whoever does not make judgments based on what is said in the Quran is a heretic (*murtad*).

In contrast, traditional religious scholars have argued that the concept of *kufir* that appears in the Quran and Hadith should not always be understood as denial of Islam (*rida*), but rather as a serious violation (*kabira*) that is a sort of minor heresy (*kufir asghar*), which is a lesser offense. According to these religious sages, this is the way the aforementioned Quranic verse should also be interpreted. The use of this verse with regard to “heretics” is not intended to portray them as abandoners of Islam (*rida*). Rather, it is intended to deter and warn, and is used from a perspective of exaggeration. The religious sages maintain that the exclusive authority for declaring that a Muslim is a heretic (*murtad*) rests with the highest ulama, who base their rulings on precise evidence. One of the commentators, Ali bin Hasan al-Halabi al-Athri, even quotes the late Shaykh Abd al-Aziz bin al-Baz (the foremost Saudi-Wahhabi religious scholar of this generation) who stated that the hasty use of *takfir* is liable to lead to the most serious consequences and transgressions of sanctioning bloodshed (*istabahat al-damaa*), destruction of homes and facilities, and theft of public funds. Every Muslim who believes in Allah and in the world to come must renounce this deviant and misleading doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

The local media launched a strong attack against al-Qaeda’s view of jihad after the 2005

bombings. The media identified it with “jihad via the sword,” violence and terror, and made a clear distinction between what was termed “legitimate resistance to the occupier.” Samer Khir Ahmed summarizes the main arguments against the *salafi* concept of jihad as follows: first, the victims of jihad organizations are mostly Muslims and not foreigners as these organizations claim; second, the jihad diverts the Islamic nation from its primary battle against imperialism, corruption and division; third, the jihad organizations seek to restore the nation’s past glory through all-out warfare against moderate Muslims who are considered enemies. But in our era, the meaning of jihad is different than it was in the past. Today jihad means instituting reforms in Muslim societies, enhancing ways of thinking and a war against backwardness.<sup>28</sup>

After the Amman bombings, Zarqawi declared in an audio recording that the attacks were aimed against “Israeli and American intelligence personnel,” thus justifying the attacks despite the fact that all of the victims were Muslims. Zarqawi’s justification for killing Muslims sparked a legal discussion in the media around the issue of *tatarus*—whether it is permissible within the framework of a Muslim war against nonbelievers to kill Muslims who are under the protection of these nonbelievers (*tatarus*). Radical *salafi* ideology grants sweeping and unconditional permission to kill these Muslims, based on a far-reaching fatwa from the classical theologian Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328).

A number of Jordanian media commentators fiercely attacked this interpretation of Islamic law based on a medieval fatwa. Bassam Nasser, for instance, states that Ibn Taymiyya’s fatwa permits the killing of Muslims only under very limited conditions—for instance, when it is impossible to defeat the enemy (*al-nakia fi al-audu*) in battle conditions in which Muslims are liable to be killed. If it is possible to kill enemies without harming Muslims, then this is preferable. It is not, however, obligatory.<sup>29</sup> Another commentator, Ali bin Hasan Al-Halabi al-Athri, pointed out the complete contradiction between the concept of *tatarus* as understood by the recognized orthodox scholars and the *salafi-jihadi* concept that “results in the killing of women, children and the elderly.” According to the true Islamic law, *tatarus* killing only occurs in a situation when a Muslim fighter is forced to do this and does not take place by choice. As such, the attacks in Amman were illogical, counterproductive, and in complete contradiction to Islamic law.<sup>30</sup>

Ali bin Hasan Al-Halabi al-Athri also attacked the *salafi-jihadi* movement’s disavowal of the protection that traditional Islamic scholars have granted to non-Muslims who enter the Islamic states (*dar al-islam*) in accordance with a defense and refuge pact (*aqd al-aman ‘ahd al-idhin wal-istiman*) made with the Muslim authorities. The commentator quotes the words of the Prophet that clearly warned against violating this religious law (*hukum*): “whoever killed a *mu’ahad* will not smell the scent of Paradise.”<sup>31</sup> It seems that the commentator’s article on the issue of *mu’ahad*, which was published several days after the 2005 bombings in Amman, was intended to undermine Zarqawi’s justification for the attacks that they were aimed simply against non-Muslims (American and Israeli military

personnel). Even in this case, the attacks constitute a crime and violate a serious prohibition, since these Americans and Israelis have the status of *mu'ahad*.

## Legislating Against Extremism

Just as the bombings in Amman served as a catalyst for intensifying the Jordanian regime's ideological struggle against *takfiri-jihadi* ideas, they also gave a political push to the enactment of legislation designed to restrict the dissemination of this ideology. In particular, this legislation sought to limit the Muslim Brotherhood's use of mosques and religious means (with an emphasis on fatwas) for political ends. These laws were approved in the parliament and senate in September 2006 after a fierce, head-on confrontation with parliamentary Islamic (Muslim Brotherhood) opposition.

The most significant law passed was the Anti-Terror Law. According to the explanations of government spokesmen, the law is designed to fight terror and violence through preventive measures, early interception, and deterrence. The law defines an act of terror as "any action conducted via any means that is likely to result in killing or bodily injury or damage to public or private property, if the objective of the action is to disturb public order and security, including via intimidation, terror and violence, or to block the implementation of the law or to influence the policy of the state or government."<sup>32</sup> The dissemination and preaching of extremist ideas are also considered part of the preparations for carrying out acts of terror, according to the interpretation of the law by these spokesmen.

The Islamic opposition in parliament and elsewhere strongly opposed the law, arguing that it violated the articles of the constitution that guarantee individual liberty and freedom of religion. The opposition also argued that the law does not clearly define what constitutes terror and grants the security forces too much latitude to define terror, thus arbitrarily placing restrictions on liberties.

Another law, known as "The Law of Fatwas," gives legal expression to the desire that was reiterated in all of the conferences—to invalidate the issuance of fatwas by "unqualified people." The main objectives of the law are, on the one hand, to establish a mechanism that will prohibit extremist elements from issuing fatwas, and on the other, to strengthen the religious establishment by granting the primary authority to issue fatwas to a governmental council on religious law. As the law states, "it is prohibited for any person or entity to issue sharia fatwas on public issues and to undermine and cast doubt on fatwas issued by the Fatwa Council (*majlis al-iftaa*) and general mufti with the goal of harming and invalidating them." All of the members of the Fatwa Council are to be appointed by the government, and will in turn be responsible, among other things, for overseeing fatwas on all public matters, issuing fatwas that the public needs, and publishing Islamic research. The general mufti is appointed by royal decree, with the rank of minister, and is responsible for managing the council. This new law and organization is

intended to block loopholes that have previously facilitated the broad circulation of “problematic” fatwas from the *takfiri-jihadi* and Muslim Brotherhood movements pertaining to government policy and political issues. In a similar vein, a recent amendment approved by the senate and parliament to another law, the “Law of Preaching and Guidance” (*kanun al-wa’z wal-arshad*), states that the use of mosques for preaching, guidance, and teaching by clergy will be permitted only with advance approval from the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs.<sup>33</sup>

## Going Forward

**A**l-Qaeda’s bombings in Amman on November 9, 2005, prompted the Jordanian government to take off its gloves and engage in a head-on ideological and political confrontation with Islamic terror movements and the *takfiri* ideological infrastructure that supports them. At the same time, the rise of a new form of extremism within the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Jordan and elsewhere during the same period intensified the regime’s sense of threat, especially due to the Brotherhood’s expressions of open support for the *takfiri* doctrine or, at best, its ambiguity about this radical doctrine.<sup>34</sup>

Against the background of these developments, the regime, backed by the institutional media, has initiated a focused attack on radical *salafi* ideology. In the regime’s view, this ideology is no less a part of terror than the means of destruction employed by the terrorists. As such, undermining this ideology and its foundations in some contemporary forms of Islamic jurisprudence would be tantamount to preemptively thwarting terrorist plots. So far, the regime’s struggle against radical *salafi* ideology has been conducted in a systematic way. The central question is how effective this comprehensive campaign by the Jordanian regime against radical ideology will be, and whether it is achieving tangible results.

There is no doubt that the Jordanian regime’s ideological counterattack has been complicated already by domestic disputes between the Jordanian religious and political establishment and the political Islamist movement, led by the Muslim Brotherhood, regarding the diagnosis and treatment of the phenomenon of terror. In the establishment’s view, the phenomenon of terror is a security problem arising out of radical ideology, and should be tackled through appropriate information campaigns and legislation. By contrast, the representatives of the camp of political Islam believe that the sources of radicalism are political backwardness, not ideology. They believe that despotism, the repression of political liberties, and the depressed socioeconomic situation all stand in the way of the regime’s desire to fight terror. Thus, the required treatment is far-reaching political and economic reform, that is, “democratization” on the road to an Islamic regime.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood has worked tirelessly to portray Islamic terrorism against unarmed civilians in Iraq and against Israel as legitimate resistance (*muqawama*) against foreign occupiers. Against this background, the Jordanian regime’s

de-legitimization of these terror organizations is not always accepted and internalized by the public at large. Nonetheless, the 2005 terror attacks in Amman by Zarqawi's al-Qaeda organization did lead the public to a more sober assessment of the radical Islamist movement, as it became apparent that the Islamist terrorists and their Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers do not distinguish between the killing of Americans, Israelis, Iraqi Shiites, or peaceful Jordanian citizens.

Both domestically and internationally, the regime's ideas-based counterattack on radical ideology has met with mixed reviews.<sup>36</sup> For instance, Ibrahim Gharbiya, a senior Jordanian expert on extremist Islamic organizations, has raised questions about the effectiveness of the state's campaign against *takfiri* ideology. After the shooting attack by a lone terrorist against a tourist group in the center of Amman on September 4, 2006, he stated that denunciations of terrorism and the information campaign to inculcate moderate Islam have not reached deeply into the general public, except among those who were already moderates. Extremist ideas and violent groups, he added, continue to serve as an instrument for recruiting activists: "Our ideological and administrative campaign to forestall extremism has not succeeded because it has not yet reached the sources of violence and crime. The existing simplistic solutions have not helped in the war against violence and have even served it. The search for the correct approach cannot be postponed."<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, the Jordanians have joined the fight. Jordan remains the one regime in the Middle East with perhaps the greatest cognizance of the ideological threat that radical *salafi* ideology poses. Unlike most other regimes in the Muslim world, Jordan has rejected the traditional paradigm of tolerance for ideological extremism in return for domestic stability, and in so doing has challenged the radical Muslim movement as a whole. It is doubtful that Jordan can succeed in this mission alone, and unfortunately, it is also doubtful that other states in the region will follow suit in the near future.

## NOTES

1. King Abdullah in an interview with CNN-Al-Rai, 24 June 2006.

According to one survey conducted prior to the attacks in Amman on 9 November 2005, some 64% of the Jordanian public sympathized with the al-Qaeda in Iraq organization led by Zarqawi. *Al-Hiyat*, 15 December 2005. However, this sympathy dropped sharply after the attacks in Amman. In a survey conducted immediately after these attacks, 72% of the sample believed that this group is a terror organization, 20% believed that it is not a terror organization, and 15.6% believed that it is a resistance organization. But after the killing of Zarqawi in June 2006, the percentage of those who regarded the organization as a terror organization dropped to 54%, while 20% still believed it is not a terror organization. By contrast, only 10% of those surveyed in 2004 believed that bin Laden's al-Qaeda organization is a terror organization, compared to 49% in 2005 and 41% in 2006. This indicates that there is greater sympathy for bin Laden's organization than for Zarqawi's. In any case, both organizations have levels of sympathy that explain the existence of a *takfiri salafiyah* infrastructure, albeit a relatively small one. *Al-Rai, Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 10 July 2006.

Ramadan al-Rawashdeh, who describes this situation, calls on scholars of Islamic law to battle against this phenomenon. *Al-Rai*, 15 June 2006. In the Old City of Amman (the Balad), near the Al-Husseini mosque, there are book stands disseminating propaganda material in the spirit of the *takfiri-jihadi* ideology. Since the second Gulf War, there has been a rise in demand in Jordan for books about the end of days and signs of the apocalypse.

A prominent example is Abed Shahadeh al-Tahawi, who is considered a source of religious law among extreme Islamic groups in Irbid. He preaches the *takfir* doctrine in mosques in the Irbid region. He was arrested and brought to trial. *Al-Dustour*, 23 May 2005; *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 6 June 2005.

2. Shmuel Bar, "The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan," Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, June 1998, 50-52.

3. Ramadan al-Rawashdeh notes that this stream regards rulers and societies that do not accept its outlook as heretics. According to Rawashdeh, the regime has become more concerned following the declaration by one of the Muslim Brotherhood's leaders, Azam al-Hanidi, that the Muslim Brotherhood is capable of assuming executive powers in light of its achievements in Egypt in the December 2005 elections and the victory of Hamas in March 2006. *Al-Rai*, 17 August 2006. In another article, published after the killing of Zarqawi, Ramadan refers to members of the Muslim Brotherhood as new Zarqawis. *Al-Rai*, 15 June 2006. Sultan al-Khateb notes the development of Muslim Brotherhood philosophy toward support for violence and insubordination vis-à-vis the ruler. Tactically, the Muslim Brotherhood adopts a path of moderation until the stage of *takwin* or *tamkin*—the stage when it is possible to grab power. Then, they will move toward confrontation with the government. *Al-Rai*, 26 June 2006. In another article, Khateb calls for neutralizing the *takfir* propaganda of some of the Islamic movement's leaders in Jordan—that is, the Muslim Brotherhood—because it serves al-Qaeda and prepares the ground for this organization to flourish. *Al-Rai*, 27 June 2006. According to Rana al-Sabaa, a new leadership stream has become stronger within the Muslim Brotherhood that is more pro-Palestinian and sympathetic to al-Qaeda's philosophy. *Al-Hiyat*, 27 August 2006.

4. A *fatwa* by the head of the Council of Ulama of the Muslim Brotherhood, Dr. Ibrahim Zayed Kilani, published on 14 August 2004 on the Jabha web site of the Islamic Action Front [www.jabha.net/fatwa.asp](http://www.jabha.net/fatwa.asp). Nadwah al-Majali summarizes how the jihad stream, on one hand, and the Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, have a stranglehold on the state and seek to undermine its foundations: "One stream attacks the regime through violence, confrontation, *takfir* and bombing attacks, while the other stream gently tunnels below the regime's foundations, penetrates the society and its institutions, mobilizes the street against it and raises doubts about its direction." *Al-Rai*, 27 June 2006.

5. The king placed the emphasis on the *takfir* schools, which constitute a platform for fanaticism, backwardness and insularity. *Al-Rai*, 25-26 November 2005.

6. Interview with the Jordanian press agency. *Al-Rai*, 13 November 2005.

7. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 12 June 2006.

8. Rana al-Sabaa notes that the dispute that developed between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood convinced the regime of the dominance of the extremist Hamasi stream in Jordan. *Al-Hiyat*, 27 June 2006.

9. Jabha web site of the Islamic Action Front, 4 July 2006.

10. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 17 August 2005.

11. *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 7 July 2005.

12. *Al-Rai Al-Ghrad*, 2 October 2006.

13. A religious ruling approved at the Islamic conference in Amman, 4-6 July 2005, granting full legitimacy to the Shi'a and regarding it as equal to the Sunna, works here to the benefit of the Muslim Brotherhood in their call to support Hezbollah. *Al-Rai Al-Ghrad*, 7 July 2005.

This discussion brings to mind the Nasserite doctrine of the 1960s that coined the concept of "unity of the ranks" (all of the Arabs against Israel) that takes precedence over "unity of purpose" (the unique conception of each regime regarding the ultimate course of the Arab world).

14. *Al-Sabil*, 29 July 2006.
15. "Jordan's 9/11 – Dealing with Jihadi Islamism," *Middle East Report* 47, International Crisis Group, 23 November 2005, p. 16; *Al-Rai Al-Ghrad*, 6-8 June 2005; *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 7 July 2005.
16. *Al-Dustour*, 16 November 2005.
17. *Al-Rai*, 19 March 2006.
18. *Al-Rai*, 27 April 2006.
19. *Al-Rai*, 29 May 2006; *Al-Ghrad*, 28 May 2006.
20. Dr. Al-Murtada bin Zayed al-Mahturi, member of the Ulama Association of Yemen and a lecturer at Sana'a University, *Al-Rai*, 29 May 2006.
21. *Al-Rai*, 29 May 2006.
22. *Al-Ghrad*, 26 June 2006; *Al-Rai*, 29 May 2006; *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 27 June 2006.
23. Dr. Abdallah Salahin, the dean of the Faculty of Shari'a at the Jordanian University, in a round-table discussion on Amman Net radio about the rise of the *takfiri-jihadi* philosophy. *Al-Dustour*, 16 November 2005; Ali bin Hasan al-Halabi al-Athri, *Al-Ghrad*, 16 December 2005. See also the decision of the ulama sages on this issue at the Amman conference in July 2005.
24. *Al-Ghrad*, 18 November 2005.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Al-Ghad*, 29 August 2005.
29. *Al-Rai*, *Al-Ghad*, 13 September 2006, 26 September 2006; *Al-Rai*, 8 September 2006.
30. The expert on extremist Islamic organizations, Mohammed Abu Raman, writes that gray areas in the various positions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood are not recent developments, but date back over twenty years. *Al-Rai*, 7 August 2006. He also writes that it is important that the message of the opposition— that is, the Muslim Brotherhood—be examined and that it express a clear philosophical stance against violence and extremism in order to channel the youth to constructive paths. In practice, he says, the Muslim Brotherhood's message fans the youth's frustration and anger, resulting in disaster for all. *Al-Hiyat*, 15 September 2006. Former Jordanian minister Salah al-Kalab notes that political Islamic movements throughout the Middle East, including Jordan, have systematically refrained from condemning terror attacks by Islamic terror organizations and have even occasionally expressed a position justifying the acts of terror. He contends that these movements have placed themselves—by extending logistical and ideological assistance for acts of terror—in the terror camp itself. *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 25 August 2006.
31. Round-table discussion between representatives of the establishment and representatives of political Islam, against the background of the Amman bombings. Internet site of *Al-Sabil*, the mouthpiece of the Muslim Brotherhood, 24 November 2006.
32. In a comprehensive study of the Jordanian regime's struggle against Islamic terror and the ideology of this terror following the Amman bombings, the International Crisis Group notes the weaknesses of the ideological part of this struggle: "The problem with the Amman Message is that it bears no relation to the situation on the ground...In an attempt to bridge the gap between weak and discredited imams and the militant *salafi* alternative in Salt, the *awqaf* and the GID [General Intelligence Department] are placing more charismatic imams or even respected community patriarchs in the city's mosques. Again the impact is open to question." The quotation appears on page 16 of the report.
33. *Al-Ghrad*, 5 September 2006.